

CASA AMESTI  
(Jose Amesti Casa)  
516 Polk Street  
Monterey  
Monterey County  
California

HALS CA-57  
*HALS CA-57*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### CASA AMESTI

HALS NO. CA-57

**Location:** 516 Polk Street, Monterey, Monterey County, CA  
Latitude 36.59753 Longitude -121.89598 (Central Fountain, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84).

**Significance:** The garden at Casa Amesti was the home garden of noted California-based interior designer Frances Adler Elkins. The garden was designed by Elkins and/or her brother, noted Chicago architect David Adler.

**History and Description:** The garden at Casa Amesti is a private, walled garden in the Monterey Old Town Historic District. It is a formal, symmetric garden, approximately 5000 square feet, of boxwood and privet parterre punctuated with columnar yews.

In 1833, José Amesti and his wife, Prudenciana Vallejo, received a land grant and built a small house on it. As their family expanded, they expanded the house to two stories with a veranda. It was the second Monterey Colonial house in Monterey. Early on, they enclosed the property with a 12 foot tall adobe wall. The extant, Mexican-era door gave access to the yard, where they raised livestock, cooked, and socialized.

In 1919, this was swept away, except for the garden wall, yard door, house, and one apple tree. Noted California-based interior designer Frances Adler Elkins (1888-1953) and her brother, noted Chicago architect David Adler (1882-1949) laid out a formal garden. Schematic landscape drawings of the garden by Adler are extant. It is not known whether the design was by Elkins, Adler, or both. The formal design was probably inspired by a courtyard garden at the Alhambra in Granada, Spain, which Elkins and Adler viewed during earlier travels through Europe. David collected postcards during their travels and borrowed elements from the postcards liberally and literally in his work. Elkins lived at Casa Amesti and maintained the garden until her death in 1953, with frequent visits from her brother. She left the property to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. It was the first West Coast property of the National Trust. The house and garden have been authentically and thoughtfully restored.

**Sources:** Adler, David. Original drawings of the garden at Casa Amesti. Stored in the library cupboard at Casa Amesti.

Adler, David. Postcard Collection. Private collection owned by Stephen Salny. "David Adler Collection." Ryerson & Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago.

Salny, Stephen. *The Country Houses of David Adler*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001.

Salny, Stephen. "Frances Elkins: A Fresh Look at the Designer's Visionary Work in California." *Architectural Digest*\_ Apr 2005.

Salny, Stephen. *Frances Elkins: Interior Design*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005.

Historian: Cathy Garrett , PGAdesign  
444 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Oakland, CA, 94612  
June 16, 2010



View of the rear of Casa Amesti across the central fountain with the central space surrounded by columnar yews (Cathy Garrett, March 2010. Courtesy PGAdesign).



Curved gravel walk and boxwood hedges (Cathy Garrett, March 2010. Courtesy PGAdesign).